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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0772

INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE

RUMIAAA/USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RHMFIS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEAHND/CDR JTF-BRAVO IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 000986

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/28/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: TFH01: ALLEGED GAS ATTACK AGAINST BRAZILIAN  
EMBASSY

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 977

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

1. (C) Summary. Embassy received reports on September 25 that a gas attack had been carried out against the Brazilian Embassy and that persons inside the Embassy, including President Zelaya, had become ill. Embassy investigated the allegations. The Brazilian Charge told Embassy that he believes there was a "minor" gas attack. The Honduran military has categorically denied the charges and told Emboffs the rumors could be based on the fact that municipal workers cleared out an empty lot next to the Brazilian Embassy. However, municipal authorities have told Embassy they did not carry out a clean-up operation or spray any insecticide at the empty lot on September 25. Embassy does not believe the Honduran military carried out a gas attack against President Zelaya at the Brazilian Embassy. However, the rapidity with which the rumors spread and the conflicting information reported to the embassy, indicates the high stress level that has been reached by all parties in the drama being played out in Tegucigalpa. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Rumors began to spread the morning of September 25 that there had been a gas attack on the Brazilian Embassy and that those inside were feeling ill. Honduran radio station Radio Globo reported around 9:30 or 10:00 a.m. that the First Lady said she had dry and itchy eyes. President Zelaya held a press conference at 10:30 a.m. at which several of his supporters inside the Brazilian Embassy reported they were urinating blood. Local newspaper "El Tiempo" carried a story on-line at 11:57 alleging that 25 to 30 persons in the Brazilian Embassy were affected by an unexplained gas or chemical. Emboffs received phone calls reporting that gas was rendering those inside the embassy ill from President Zelaya's Minister of Social Issues Arcadia Lopez; Liberal anti-coup Congresswoman Argentina Valle, former head of the Honduran Internal Revenue Service (DEI) Armando Saramiento, and executive director of human rights NGO the Committee for the Family of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (CODAFEH).

3. (C) Due to the seriousness of the allegations, the Embassy began to look into them right away. Within the framework of Department guidance regarding contact with Honduran officials and military, the Ambassador spoke with de facto regime Chief of Defense MG Romeo Vasquez Velasquez and asked Vasquez if he had heard rumors of a gas attack on the Brazilian Embassy. Vasquez said he had heard the rumors, but denied such an

attack had been launched, noting that such an act would be immensely foolish, especially on the same day the United Nations Security Council was meeting to discuss Honduras (See reftel).

14. (C) Brazilian Charge d'Affaires Francisco Catunda told DCM that he believed there was a "minor attack" with gas. He said, however, that Zelaya supporters had overreacted and also questioned their motivation as they had refused help from the Honduran Red Cross after the incident. Catunda said the Zelaya supporters in the embassy would only accept help from their own doctors who entered the embassy. According to Catunda, these doctors reported that three persons had bloody noses and/or vomiting and two or three were suffering diarrhea. Catunda reported that one of his employees had some trouble breathing.

15. (SBU) Political Counselor attempted unsuccessfully to speak to the First Lady, but spoke to Carlos Eduardo Reina, son of Honduran Permanent Representative to the United Nations Arturo Reina. Reina said that around 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. on September 25, those inside the Embassy began to smell an odor that left a metallic taste in their mouths. Reina described the odor as humidity or the smell one encounters on entering a room that has been shut for a long time. Reina said President Zelaya experienced headache, dizziness, an aching throat, and abdominal pain. Political Counselor asked Reina whether any Brazilian diplomatic personnel became ill and he responded that one diplomat had told him he felt sick.

#### The Device

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16. (C) According to Reina, President Zelaya told some of his followers to go outside the embassy to check on the situation. Reina said Zelaya supporters climbed up onto the embassy perimeter wall and saw a device, which Reina described as resembling a cigar humidifier, with a bag on it containing a substance. Reina said the device was located in the garden next to the wall of the house adjacent to and behind the embassy on the left. Reina told Political Counselor that the Zelaya supporters reported seeing eight to ten soldiers and police wearing hoods around the device guarding it. (Comment: DNIC police routinely wear hoods to protect their identity.)

17. (SBU) The RSO and A/RSO went to the roof of the U.S. Embassy to look down on the Brazilian Embassy. They saw Zelaya supporters on the roof of the Brazilian Embassy. One of the supporters was talking into a cell phone and another was watching approximately four soldiers on top of the roof of the house to the west of the embassy watching them. The RSOs then saw four Zelaya supporters climbing a tree from the Brazilian Embassy side and entering the property behind the Brazilian Embassy. The A/RSO saw one of them apparently cutting some razor wire so they could get to the other side. The RSOs did not observe them wearing masks over their faces or showing signs of choking. The RSOs observed the scene for about ten minutes. When they returned to the roof fifteen minutes later, they no longer saw the Zelaya supporters.

18. (C) First Lady Xiomara Castro de Zelaya sent the Ambassador by e-mail photographic evidence allegedly confirming the gas attack. MG Vasquez told the Ambassador that he had seen the photos and that the device shown in one of the photos was a speaker used to blast noise to dislodge crowds. Vasquez said the photograph was taken on September 22 when the military put up such speakers to disperse the demonstrators gathered outside the Brazilian Embassy. (Comment: The device in the photograph does appear to have a plastic bag on it, which conceivably could be in place to keep the speaker from getting wet in case of rain. End Comment.)

## Municipal Clean Up

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¶9. (C) MG Vasquez told the Ambassador that municipal workers had been spraying an insecticide in the area and speculated that might have sparked the rumors of a gas attack. The Honduran military commander in charge at the Brazilian Embassy on September 25, Colonel Hernandez Castro, told a DAO officer that municipal staff had used machines to clean out an empty lot adjacent to the Embassy. However, the office of Tegucigalpa Mayor Ricardo Alvarez told Embassy that the municipality cleaned up trash in the empty lot next to the Brazilian Embassy on September 22, but had not been allowed by the military to enter the area since that day. The Economic Counselor spoke to Cesar Villa, the protocol officer at the Secretariat of Public Works, Transport, and Housing, who said that he was aware of rumors that the symptoms reportedly experienced by President Zelaya and his supporters were the result of spraying by municipal authorities, but that he could state with certainty that no/no such spraying had taken place. The UN security chief, who lives behind the Brazilian Embassy, told RSO on September 27 that when the area around the Brazilian Embassy was cleaned up, a lot of tear gas residue was raised up.

## The Latrines

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¶10. (SBU) RSO took a photograph of the Brazilian Embassy at approximately 16:30 local time on September 25, which showed a tanker truck bearing license plate number PCG1349 near the vacant lot adjoining the Brazilian Embassy. A photograph of this truck appeared in an on-line "El Tiempo" newspaper article reporting that there had been a gas attack on the Brazilian diplomatic mission. The vacant lot next to the Brazilian Embassy currently has a canvas green tent and two

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portable toilets on it. It is possible that the truck was bearing away the waste from the toilets and, although we have no evidence of this, it could be possible that the personnel in the truck used chlorine bleach to clean the bathrooms. Prosecutor Alex Hidalgo, who was posted outside the Brazilian Embassy on September 25, told Poloff that he understood that a truck had come to clean out the latrines.

## The Toxicologist

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¶11. (C) Liberal Party congresswoman Argentina Valle told Poloff that she and a group of Zelaya supporters met with Dr. Denis Castro Bodadilla, a well-known Honduran toxicologist. Valle told Poloff that Castro told her he had confirmed the presence of a gas that was causing illness. Poloff spoke to Dr. Castro, who stated that he believed a chemical, similar to tear gas, had been used against the Brazilian Embassy. He said he has not visited the Brazilian Embassy and based his evaluation of the situation on testimony from the First Lady. (Note: Dr. Castro is a long-time Zelaya supporter and former head of the Honduran Forensic Medicine Office, with a wide reputation for providing expert testimony suited to the highest bidder in Honduran criminal trials, including several involving murdered American citizens. End Note.)

¶12. (C) Comment: The Honduran police used tear gas to disperse demonstrators outside the Brazilian Embassy on September 22. They also used a device emitting a high noise against the Brazilian diplomatic compound. Embassy believes that those inside the Brazilian Embassy could on September 25 still be feeling the effects of the tear gas and of the noise machine. It is unclear to Embassy if Zelaya supporters genuinely believed that their symptoms were the result of a gas attack. Even if they did believe that an attack had

taken place, it appears that they exaggerated the effects in order to gain sympathetic publicity. The military's claim that clean up took place at the vacant lot next to the Embassy is perplexing, but they could have been referring to the clean up that took place on September 22 rather than to events on September 25. What does seem clear is that the parties are suspicious of each other, tensions are running high, and the rumor mill is churning away, resulting in an extremely volatile situation. End Comment.

LLORENS